

Forms and consequences of professionalization in international sport federations: between rationalization and political reality

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Aim of abstract/paper - research question

Over the last 30 years, the activities of international sport federations (ISF) have changed drastically from simply being the governing body, making and supervises international rules, to being a global actor at multiple levels, including the organisation of major events, commercialization of rights and development of and through their sport. By evolving from mainly administrative and volunteer-run organisations to more professionalized structures with an increased business focus, different forms of professionalization have emerged. To distinguish these forms, researchers need to analyse the federation's internal situation (e.g. professionalization of individuals, structures and procedures, activities) as well as external factors (e.g. political factors such as regulatory requirements, economic factors such as the national economy, social factors such as image of the organisation and technology factors such as information and communication). This paper tries to elucidate the different forms of professionalization, and the respective consequences that these forms may entail, especially with regard to governance and strategic management.

Theoretical background/literature review

Though previous research has focused on organisational change in national federations and clubs, the professionalization of ISF has received very little attention. Organisational change, new institutionalism and strategic choice theory appear to be appropriate theoretical approaches to remedy this lack. Organisational change encompasses increasing rationalization of structures and procedures due to the gradual replacement of volunteers by professionals (Thibault, Slack, & Hinings, 1991), and the role of individual key actors as accelerators or decelerators of change in sport federations. The new institutionalism perspective allows us to look at the federations' organisational context, which, in the course of business-orientation and commercialization, is becoming more and more influenced by political, economic and regulatory aspects, inevitably impacting on their decisions and actions (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). In this field of constantly changing interactions and interdependencies, federations try to achieve stability by creating strategic alliances. The strategic

choice theory will therefore be applied, implying dynamic processes at the external level as much as choices of individual key actors or groups (Miles, Snow, Meyer, & Coleman, 1978).

Methodology, research design and data analysis

The conceptual framework of Nagel et al. (Nagel, Schlesinger, Bayle, & Giauque, 2015) on causes, forms and consequences of professionalization of sport federations was employed. Focussing on the period 1990-2015, forms were examined by looking at three dimensions: activities (diversification, strategic planning), individuals (profiles of paid staff) and structures and processes (formalization, specialization). The analysis of consequences focussed on governance changes and aspects of leadership at the sport federation level, their impact on member federations and expectations of and relationships with external stakeholders. A two-tier approach was chosen: an exploratory study, nine case studies. Data collection started in September 2014 and comprises multiple sources of evidence. To gather in-depth information from within seven international sport federations, semi-structured interviews (n=25) with staff members from different hierarchical levels and functions were conducted. Information from interviews was triangulated with federations' internal documents (annual reports, organisation charts, statutes), external documents (IOC evaluation criteria, Agenda 2020), and relevant literature.

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

Our analysis of forms and consequences of professionalization allowed us to distinguish specific adaptation configurations. These show strong resemblance with the typology of Miles and Snow (1978). Furthermore, an increasingly politicized environment induces new challenges. In this context, the role of individual key actors and their leadership styles (Bayle, 2001), as well as political stability play a crucial role in ISF strategic management, influencing notably the intensity and speed of organisational changes. Based on leaders' ability to manage increasingly intricate political, economic and social aspects, ISF professionalize at different speeds.

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